

In the News

Safe Haven for Seniors

The elderly can feel a little safer, thanks to a court in Alameda County committed to meeting their legal needs.

An article in the January 6 editions of the *Contra Costa Times* and *San Ramon Valley Times* featured an Oakland courtroom that is helping protect seniors. The stories describe the courtroom—presided over by Judge Julie Conger—and its calendar dedicated to elder abuse cases. Court staff flag these cases when they are filed, and the litigants are introduced to Judge Conger's courtroom. These seniors are abused and confused. Often they are seeking restraining orders against the people who are supposed to be taking care of them.

The article discusses a relatively new elder abuse law and the rise in elder abuse filings. Nearly 200 cases were reported in Alameda County in fiscal year 2001-2002—a 393 percent increase from the previous year.

The publicity given to the court enables more abused senior citizens to take advantage of the specialized calendar and raises public awareness of the court's efforts to reach out to the community.

Other stories in the news:

'Interpreter Serves Vital Function,' *Modesto Bee*, February 23, 2003

Described the need for skilled court interpreters in Stanislaus

County and mentioned the state Judicial Council's list of certified interpreters.

'Court Launches Small Claims Web Site,' *Westside Advance* (Kerman), February 19, 2003

Announced the Superior Court of Fresno County's new interactive Web site that helps litigants complete court forms in small claims actions.

'Homeless Court Offers Gentle Justice,' *Sacramento Bee*, February 15, 2003

Featured the Superior Court of San Diego County's Homeless Court, which helps homeless litigants get back on their feet by clearing up minor infractions.

'Court Programs on Hold for Now,' *Desert Sun* (Riverside), February 15, 2003

Praised the Superior Court of Riverside County's Family Assistance Center, and explained that the court's plan to expand the center is on hold due to budget constraints.

'Mock Trial,' *Daily Journal* (Ukiah), February 9, 2003

Reported on an educational mock trial competition presided over by Superior Court of Mendocino County Judge Cindee Mayfield.

'A Glimpse Into S.J. County Civil,' *News-Sentinel* (Lodi), February 7, 2002, and **'Civil**



An Alameda County courtroom presided over by Judge Julie Conger (center) has a calendar dedicated to elder abuse cases. Photo: Courtesy of the Contra Costa Times/Cindi Christie

Court System a Unique Entity,' *Tracy Press*, January 27, 2003

Described the small claims court in San Joaquin County and remarked that it is very different from the one seen in the television series *Judge Judy*.

'Court Opens Kids' Room,' *Press Telegram* (Long Beach), February 1, 2003, and **'Opening of Child Waiting Room,'** *Compton Bulletin*, January 29, 2003

Announced the opening of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County's latest children's waiting room, located in Compton.

'Strictly Legal: Legal Self-Help Center Opens,' *Goleta Valley Voice*, January 27, 2003

Described a new self-help center in the Superior Court of Santa Barbara County that provides how-to information and can assist users in completing forms.

'Mental Health Court Offers New Beginning,' *Inde-*

pendent (San Francisco), January 21, 2003

Reported on the Superior Court of San Francisco County's behavioral health court, which diverts mentally ill defendants away from jails and helps provide them with needed treatment.

'Courtroom to Schoolroom Program Gets Straight A's,' *Tracy Press*, December 25, 2002

Featured the Superior Court of San Joaquin County's Courtroom to Schoolroom program, which introduces youth to the legal system.

'Professionals in Los Angeles Share in Jury Service,' *Long Beach Leader*, December 6, 2002

Reported on a study released by the Superior Court of Los Angeles County that concluded that judges, attorneys, and other justice system professionals participate in jury service in nearly the same proportion as does the rest of the population. ■

AOC Staff Get Taste of Trial Courts

Wouldn't the entire judicial branch benefit if all key staff at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) had actually spent time working in the trial courts? The AOC thinks so. And so do the court executive officers and other staff members of 12 Bay Area and Sacramento-area courts who, in partnership with the AOC, developed the new AOC Staff Training in the Courts program.

The program's goals are to foster collaboration and to expose more AOC staff to trial

court processes and responsibilities. To reduce travel expenses, these 12 courts were approached to help with the pilot program because of their proximity to most AOC employees.

One of the court executive officers who helped to shape the program commented that it is "a crucial step in the evolution of the relationship between the AOC and the trial courts. If we are to exist as one family, we need to close the gap of understanding."

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

The pilot program debuts in March with four members of the AOC's Executive Office Programs Division beginning work assignments in San Mateo and Alameda Counties. In sessions lasting a week-and-a-half, pairs of AOC employees will meet with court managers and staff to gain knowledge of caseload, time requirements, public contact issues, the judicial process, inter-

dependence with other government agencies, and other operational issues. Participants will shadow court staff and participate in the "nuts and bolts" of day-to-day trial court operations, including observing the workflow for significant case types. Training will include, for example, orientation to:

- Civil case process—filings, case management conferences, alternative dispute resolution, and discovery and settlement proceedings;

- Criminal case process—arraignments, preliminary hearings, pretrial motions, trials, and sentencing;

- Assignment of court reporters;

- Assignment of court interpreters; and

- Jury process—creation of the master list, summoning, excusals, and paneling.

Three to six months after the initial court training, pro-

gram participants will visit another court of contrasting size to gain a better perspective of how different courts operate.

COORDINATING THE PROGRAM

After evaluating the pilot, the AOC plans to have the Bay Area/Northern Coastal Regional Office manage the initial phase of the training program. That office will enlist a liaison in each court to help arrange the training particulars and to introduce AOC participants to court management and staff.

To keep the program current and meaningful, the AOC will have ongoing discussions with participating courts. If the pilot is successful, the program may be expanded to include the AOC's other regional offices and additional courts.

● For more information, contact Pat Sweeten, Director, AOC's Executive Office Programs Division, 415-856-7560; e-mail: pat.sweeten@jud.ca.gov. ■

Participating Courts

Following are the counties that volunteered to participate in developing the pilot phase of the AOC Staff Training in the Courts program.

Alameda
Contra Costa
Marin
Napa
Sacramento
San Benito

San Francisco
San Mateo
Santa Clara
Solano
Sonoma
Yolo

Judge Kenneth M. Kawaichi Receives Access to Justice Award



Judge Kenneth M. Kawaichi

Superior Court of Alameda County Judge Kenneth M. Kawaichi is the 2002 recipient of the Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award. Chief Justice Ronald M. George presented the award to Judge Kawaichi at the California Judicial Administration Conference (CJAC) on February 27 in San Francisco.

Sponsored by the Judicial Council, the State Bar, and the California Judges Association—in association with the California Commission on Access to Justice—the award is presented annually to a trial judge or an appellate justice whose activities demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving access to the courts for low- and moderate-income Californians. It is named for the late Judge Benjamin Aranda III, who was known for his tireless efforts

to promote fairness in and access to the courts.

Judge Kawaichi's long and distinguished career has been dedicated to improving access to the judicial system for disadvantaged Californians. He began this work more than 30 years ago when he represented litigants pro bono in the federal district court for Alameda County Legal Aid. He later served on the board of that organization and chaired the legal panel of the Berkeley-Albany ACLU.

As a judge, he has worked to improve assistance to self-represented litigants and to ensure access to the justice system for those with limited English proficiency. He chaired the Judicial Council's pioneering task force on race and ethnic bias and today chairs that group's successor—the council's

Access and Fairness Advisory Committee. Judge Kawaichi has donated time and energy to the access and fairness committees of many other organizations, starting with his own court. He also spearheaded the creation of the first such committee of the Alameda County Bar and sponsored many innovative projects, including a summer clerkship for minority law students.

Judge Kawaichi's problem-solving approach toward making institutional changes and establishing partnerships with other branches of government and affiliated justice agencies led to key improvements in access to justice for Alameda County citizens. Most notably, he helped create the county's first legal service centers for low- and moderate-income residents and helped organize community out-

reach forums to address barriers to the judicial system.

Judge Kawaichi has made a significant difference as an educator. He has chaired both the Judicial Support Network and the Center for Judicial Education and Research's Fairness Education Committee. He has also served on the faculties of numerous local, statewide, and national bar and bench associations. Among them are the National Judicial College, the National Consortium of Race and Ethnic Bias Task Forces, the Council of Chief Justices, and the National Center for State Courts.

Prior recipients of the Aranda award include Justice Judith McConnell (1999), Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District; Judge Veronica McBeth (2000), Superior Court of Los Angeles County; Judge Charles W. Campbell, Jr. (2001), Superior Court of Ventura County; and Judge Donna J. Hitchens (2002), Superior Court of San Francisco County. ■

Interpreter Status

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was Superior Court of San Joaquin County Presiding Judge George J. Abdallah, Jr. The workshops provided participants with an outline of actions that needed to take place over the next six months. In addition, conference attendees had an opportunity to express their concerns and raise questions about the legislation.

CIP staff again teamed up with the AOC's Labor and Employee Relations Unit to conduct three Labor Relations Regional Forums in October and November. The forums provided information directly to labor and employee relations representatives from the trial courts of all three regions. AOC and court staffs discussed the impacts of SB 371 on certain key issues, such as employment classification, bargaining structure, and hiring criteria.

In addition to holding ongoing meetings and conference calls with court interpreter coordinators, CIP staff met with the Judicial Council's Court Interpreters Advisory Panel in November to discuss issues surrounding the implementation of SB 371. During the meeting, the panel set goals and restructured its subcommittees to better address current challenges, including those posed by SB 371.

SB 371 IMPLEMENTATION WORKING GROUP

In October CIP staff helped create the Senate Bill 371 Implementation Administrative Working Group to gather data and to advise and provide input to the judicial branch during the implementation process. The group is co-chaired by Susan Hough, the AOC's Human Resources Division director, and

Alan Slater, Executive Officer of the Superior Court of Orange County. It is diverse, representing multiple parties affected by the legislation. The group is made up of court interpreters (including one member from each of the three interpreter associations in California), court executives, court interpreter coordinators, judges, and additional AOC staff.

After several teleconferences, CIP staff staged the first in-person meeting of the working group on January 11 in Southern California. At that meeting, members discussed the gathering of interpreter data, cross-assignment of interpreters, discipline issues, compensation, and the creation of regional employee relations committees.

On January 10-11, members of the working group became the panel for an open forum attended by more than 100 interpreters from many counties. Interpreters participated by preparing questions for the panel on variety of issues affecting their future employment with the courts.

"The input and recommendations provided by the working group as well as other court staff have been extremely helpful," says Mr. Beacon. "We have used this information to help guide the implementation process. It has also allowed us to tailor our trainings and resource materials to meet the needs of the courts."

FAST-TRACK TRAINING

To further educate court staff, the AOC in January held four Fast-Track training sessions across the state to provide practical explanations of what trial courts need to do in order to meet the deadlines established by the legislation. The sessions, which took place in Burbank, Modesto, Sacramento, and San Francisco, included presentations from the

CIP Unit as well as from the AOC's regional human resources analysts, who are familiar with the courts in their regions.

DATA COLLECTION

With input from the courts, the AOC's CIP Unit partnered with the AOC's Research and Planning Unit to develop the Court Interpreters Data Collection System. The system will enable trial courts to keep track of interpreter usage and to determine which interpreters are eligible to be offered employment by the courts in July. In addition, the AOC is working on a Web-based system that the courts can use for the scheduling of interpreters.

NEXT STEPS

There is still much to be done before SB 371 can be fully implemented. At the Judicial Council's February 28 meeting, the CIP Unit presented and obtained approval from the council for two new rules of court and an amendment to rule 984.3. The rules allow for the establishment of Regional Court Interpreter Employment Relations Committees (RCIERCs) and finalize the procedures for cross-assigning court interpreters within and across regions.

Under the new rules, the committees—to be made up of a cross-section of trial court representatives—will set the terms and conditions of employment for court interpreters, adopt rules for employer-employee relations, and act as the representatives of the trial courts within their regions in bargaining with recognized unions. The new rules also call for regional interpreter coordinator positions to assist local coordinators in scheduling cross-assignments for interpreters appearing in more than one county.

"Developing policies and procedures that will meet the needs of each regional court will be a challenge," says Mr. Drapac,

a member of the Senate Bill 371 Implementation Administrative Working Group. "Together with our regional partners, we are regularly in contact with AOC staff to provide input on and obtain direction on how best to implement the provisions of this legislation. Their continued guidance throughout this implementation process is essential."

RESOURCES

The AOC is continuing its efforts to deliver timely information on the implementation of the bill to court interpreters, presiding judges, court executives, the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel, and the Judicial Council. One of these efforts is the planned distribution of a Frequently Asked Questions and Answers worksheet. The worksheet is a collection of questions posed to the AOC's CIP Unit at every venue where SB 371 was a topic of discussion, from labor forums to the workshops.

In addition to the questions-and-answers document, the AOC's Human Resources Division is collaborating with the Office of the General Counsel to develop a document consisting of the text of SB 371 and a narrative in plainer language. That document is scheduled to be published this spring.

The AOC's Human Resources Division is also developing a model job description and application form for new trial court interpreter employees. The AOC will distribute this application packet to the RCIERCs to aid them in developing their regional policies and procedures.

● For more information on the interpreters bill or implementation projects, contact Chris Kingery, AOC's CIP Unit, 415-865-7631; e-mail: chris.kingery@jud.ca.gov. ■